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ABSTRACT

College Reading Improvement Programs (CRIPs) have become increasingly significant in higher education because there is an increased need for the services they provide in colleges and universities. The first such program appeared in 1915. From 1956 to the present, research has documented a marked increase in the number of CRIPs. In examining the literature, however, it is well to remember that CRIPS may refer to anything from a single remedial course to a comprehensive remedial program. In a 1986 survey by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, it was found that nationwide, 90% of higher education institutions offered some type of remedial support. The increase in the numbers of CRIPs since its beginnings is a testament to the programs' reaction to demands of educators, students, and parents in response to a changing world in which the amount of information has constantly exploded. Institutions are under pressure to produce better informed and more highly skilled students. Professors are therefore under pressure to give students the best possible preparation to enable them to have successful lives and careers. (Contains 29 references.) (SG)

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College Reading Improvement Programs: An Issue of Growth

College Reading Improvement Programs (CRIPS) have become increasingly significant in higher education because there has been an increased need for the services they provide in our nation's colleges and universities. To trace their beginnings and proliferation is to record the demand for these services. There are two factors to be addressed in a consideration of the number of programs. First, does the literature show that the numbers have increased? Second, has this movement permeated undergraduate, four year institutions of different levels and types?

The number of CRIPS is of interest because it traces the pattern of growth of these programs. The rapid increase in their sheer numbers took precedence over most other considerations in the literature from the 1920's until the mid-fifties. CRIPS in the literature may refer to anything from a single remedial course to a comprehensive remedial reading program. Bliesmer, in the Yearbooks of the Southwest Reading Conference (Texas), later renamed the National Reading Conference reflects consistently increased interest in the number of CRIPS reported in the many surveys conducted. Less attention was devoted to other concerns such as the types of materials used, staff training, instructional time factors, etc. than to the growth in such programs. The number of college reading improvement programs reported increased steadily from 1915 to 1955. In this country's first survey, Parr (1929) studied 40 state universities. Of

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the nine institutions which responded, seven reported making an attempt to identify poor readers among their freshman class members.

Strang (1937) conducted a survey of 158 colleges and received responses from 82 programs for a response rate of 52%. The following year, Traxler (1938) reported that of the 656 colleges and universities which he surveyed, 76 or 11.6% reported having reading improvement programs. Three years after Traxler, Charter (1941) surveyed 676 institutions with 106 (15.7%) indicating they had programs. The next year, in 1942, Triggs surveyed 1,528 institutions of which 185 (12.1%) reported having such programs, and 73 additional institutions indicated they were planning to institute such programs the following year. In 1955, Causey reported 418 colleges with reading improvement programs in existence.

From 1956 to the present, surveys confirmed a marked increase in the number of college reading improvement programs. In 1961, Shaw contacted 505 schools and received responses from 350 of them. 242 or 47.9% reported reading improvement programs. The total number of colleges contacted by Shaw represented about 25% of the schools in existence at that time. In 1968, Geerlof and Kling conducted a survey in which 336 questionnaires were sent out to colleges and universities. Of the 246 institutions responding, 210 (62.5%) reported that they were operating college reading improvement programs. Huslin (1975) conducted a survey of 280, four year colleges and universities. 177 institutions responded to a

questionnaire. 157 (56.1%) reported having CRIPS. In 1976, Schantz conducted a survey of 100, four year institutions. 70 schools or about 70% reported having college reading improvement programs. In a national survey in 1984 conducted by Roueche, of the 1,452 institutions contacted only 160 confirmed that they had no basic skills programs, courses or alternatives for meeting students' literacy needs. In another survey conducted in 1986 by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, questionnaires were sent out to 100 colleges and universities. It was found that nationwide, 90% of institutions offered some type of remedial support. According to this study, 66% of colleges and universities in academic year 1983-84 provided remediation in reading. In a national survey conducted by Lederman with 1,269 institutions reporting, it was found that 85% of responding institutions perceived poor academic skills among freshmen to be either "very much of a problem" or "somewhat of a problem." Nonetheless, there are strong indications especially in the earlier surveys that many more colleges and universities sponsored reading programs than the responses suggest. Several of the researchers advanced the thesis that low response rates were due in part to a reluctance to reveal or confirm the existence of these relatively low-status "remedial" reading programs on their campuses.

The numbers of CRIPS in existence is an important indicator of the need for these programs. However, this matter is not that clear cut. The sources used to ascertain this information were surveys, but the institutions contacted

in these surveys varied. As a matter of fact, the types of institutions contacted in different surveys also varied. For example, in some surveys such as those of Leedy (1958) and Linquist (1949) only first and second tier institutions were contacted while Buffone (1966) and Geerlof and Kling (1968) used mostly third and fourth tier institutions. This is significant because the CRIPS movement started among first tier institutions. So if a survey were conducted of mainly first and second tier institutions, higher rates were more likely to be reported among those tiers relative to the time the survey was conducted than among the third and fourth tier schools within whose ranks the movement took longer to penetrate. This is ironic because institutions in the third and fourth tiers presently have the greater need for such programs. It is also interesting to note that many private colleges and universities and fewer public institutions nursed the earliest programs. Yet, the Parr study was conducted using only some major state universities. The results of this survey was no surprise.

The literature on CRIPS documents the growth of these programs in two ways. It records the numbers of programs in existence, and it also records the depth of the movement through different types and levels of institutions as they developed over time. A critical look at this literature also reveals that the demand for such programs was not limited to any one geographic region of this country. Demand for these services seems to have been ubiquitious in terms of

geography. The college reading improvement movement in the United States first developed in the leading institutions in this country. These institutions are highly selective and therefore admit only the most highly qualified students. One may conclude then that even well qualified students with good backgrounds can benefit from work in reading improvement. It is fair to assume that at least a percentage of this need for improvement has come about as a result of higher national expectations for literacy as Resnick and Resnick (1980) and Whimbey (1987) effectively argue. Through a critical look at the literature on CRIPS (College Reading Improvement Programs), one can gain much needed insight into where college reading improvement programs are headed.

One clear trend is in the number of programs. The fact that these programs have mushroomed in schools across the country is a strong indication of the need for them.

The first reading experiment with college students was performed by Abell (1894) on a Wellesley College psychology class. Subsequent to this, as CRIPS burgeoned nationwide, students were first tested then treated. It is apparent, therefore, that there was an attempt to be scientific in the identification of needy students. It is significant that interest in reading skills first developed as a branch of psychology and that there has been consistent effort to be scientific in approach in every aspect of these programs.

One can assume that these programs have increased in number out of a strong demand for them. Administrators and some educators as well as students and their parents have

recognized the need for these programs. Such was the case with the first program of its type which was instituted at Harvard University in 1915. The increase in the numbers of these programs is a testament to the institution's reaction to demands of educators, students and parents or guardians in response to a changing world in which the amount of information has constantly exploded. This has necessitated that students be exposed to much more information during the same four years. Institutions are under pressure to produce better informed and more highly skilled students. Professors are therefore under pressures, due to their sense of professional ethics and responsibility to their students as well as to society, to give students the best possible preparation to enable them to have successful lives and careers.

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